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Tibet Information Network

TIN BACKGROUND BRIEFING PAPER

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A FORBIDDEN POLITICAL DOCUMENT FROM TIBET

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A Forbidden Political Document From Tibet

In late 1988 a group of 10 young Tibetan monks, led by Ngawang Phulchung, published in secret several hundred copies of a political manifesto. The manifesto, which describes the hopes of the group for a future society based on a constitution guaranteeing democracy and human rights, offers the clearest description so far to reach the outside world of the objectives of the pro-independence movement in Tibet.

The monks, known as 'The Drepung Group' after the monastery where they lived, also produced other documents, including a Tibetan translation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They were arrested and tried by a court in Lhasa in November 1989 for producing 'reactionary propaganda' and for forming a 'counter revolutionary organisation'. They received prison sentences averaging 15 years each.

A copy of the manifesto was sent by sympathisers to Tibet Information Network in London and is reproduced here in full.

Reference: TIN Doc 6(J)
Translator: R.Schwartz
Original document: 11 pages; cyclostyled, from a handwritten original in U-Chen script
Received from Lhasa Feb 1989 approx.

The Precious Democratic Constitution of Tibet

Although it is difficult to describe what our future situation will be, it is the responsibility of everyone to prepare for the future. If Tibetans continue to struggle with a courageous determination based on the force of established truth, we will not always have to remain under the foreign Chinese invaders; possessing the right to self-determination in accordance with international law, there is no doubt that we will be able to enjoy the splendour of all religious and political freedoms.

Having completely eradicated the practices of the old society with all its faults, the future Tibet will not resemble our former condition and be a restoration of serfdom or be like the so-called 'old system' of rule by a succession of feudal masters or monastic estates. Understanding that a democratic government embodying both

religious and secular principles is necessary, and for the purpose of demonstrating the future way forward for the Tibetan people, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has bestowed a national law for a future Tibet that accords with the general practice of the contemporary world.

This constitution is based on the sacred teachings elegantly spoken by the Buddha, as well as the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the right to self-determination, and the proclaimed authority to exercise the right to self-determination.

In this constitution there is equality without discrimination between clergy and laypersons, or on the basis of sex, language, religion, social origin, race, wealth, region, or any other status. The inhumane treatment of subjects will cease; slavery, exploitative labour, and child labour are not permitted. Furthermore, the constitution clearly proclaims that each Tibetan has an equal right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, freedom of assembly, the right to life, to vote, freedom of movement, freedom of employment, freedom of expression, and the right to form associations. A broad and democratic path for developing society through the freedom and free choice of the people has been settled on.

In order to practice democracy embodying religious and secular principles, it is necessary to understand well the meaning of the term 'democracy' [Tibetan: *dmangs gtso*, literally, 'people-paramount']. For example, the first syllable, 'people' [*dmangs*], refers to the broad masses, not to a few people, and does not differentiate on the basis of heredity, power, or wealth. Their thoughts are paramount; or, in other words, the broad masses are held to be the final authority. Also, speaking from another point of view, if we take the case of our Tibetan people, the term 'people' [*dmangs*] refers to the broad masses of the three provinces of Tibet. As for the second syllable of the word for democracy [*gtso*], it should be understood to mean regarding the thoughts and wishes of the people as paramount. Reasoning thusly, 'democracy' [*dmangs gtso*] refers to a popular system which fundamentally accords with the needs, wishes, and choices of the broad masses. Under the broad framework provided by the democratic constitution, people with different individual views of what course of action to follow, by exercising their democratic prerogatives, will also be able to practice what they think and speak without need of fear, hypocrisy, or concealment.

As for the means for progress in the future, it is necessary to build political and social organisation on the basis of the cooperation and consent of the broad masses of Tibet. This kind of organisation must be constructed by the broad masses or by their representatives whose powers are limited by the people. Apart from that, an organisation built on the rule of force and coercion can never be justified. With regard to the representatives, both the nomination of the representatives and their election must be decided according

to the wishes of the masses. Such a system of government is a democratic system. [Using the government-in-exile as an example], the Assembly of People's Deputies plays the leading role in the conduct of the National Assembly for the purpose of the Tibetan government deciding vital important decisions. Likewise, if we take the example of the cooperative settlement societies [in the exile community in India], the representatives elected by the people of that area decide important decisions on a majority basis.

Not only is this democratic system in accordance with contemporary conditions, it is also in accordance with the philosophy of Buddhism. If the future government of Tibet is a government formed by the people, embodying religious and secular principles, then such a government can be accepted as being a people's government. A constitution for a future Tibet should be based on the contemporary system of democracy and should also accord with the actual situation in Tibet.

In order to exercise equality, freedom, and democratic rights, it is necessary to clearly understand the fundamental nature of democracy. Democracy does not mean being allowed to do whatever one feels like doing without any respect for order. Neither do democratic rights excuse pursuing selfish interests without the need to fulfill corresponding democratic responsibilities.

In summary, in order for Tibet to be administered in the future by Tibetans, and for Tibetans to decide Tibetan affairs, and in order for Tibetans to be able to exercise for themselves the rights intended by the precious constitution, we must remind ourselves that everyone, young and old, must steadfastly do whatever they can in every way, directly and indirectly, for the movement to restore Tibetan freedom.
